

A Plea
For One Methodism



By Bishop Earl Cranston

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BY BISHOP EARL CRANSTON

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ART. II.—A PLEA FOR ONE METHODISM

[NOTE: This paper is a personal expression concerning the subject treated; but the writer believes its spirit fairly represents the attitude of the church.]

WHETHER or not this plea will serve the end to which it is prayerfully devoted, the writer cannot foresee; but with the little time remaining to him in the order of nature he dares not withhold nor postpone the plea that is in his soul. Many a family feud has been left to continue its deadly work indefinitely because hearts have timidly hesitated to utter their longings for reconciliation lest they be rebuffed or accused of disloyalty to their own clan. But the Christian's first allegiance is to Jesus Christ, and every moment is opportune for declaring his primacy over party, clan, or family. Moreover, the signs in the heavens as seen through the yielding mists of earth encourage utterance now.

The unmistakable desire of a large majority of the ministers and members of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the unification of Methodism is due quite as directly to an inspired fraternal consciousness impelling all believers, especially those of kindred faith, to seek a closer fellowship, as it is to a recognition of the evils that grow out of the continuance of unseemly estrangements. Any who intimate that this desire has its motive in ecclesiastical ambition and lust of power such as numbers give, are hurtfully deceiving themselves and wronging both our people and their own. That suggestion refuses God's Spirit his legitimate function in turning the hearts of his people toward each other. For the sake of Protestantism and patriotism, as well as Methodism, and, most of all, religion, this plea and every other of like import should have unhindered access to the hearts of all concerned. Why should not the people of all the Methodisms know both sides of every issue out of which alienations have been engendered and perpetuated? And why should bitterness born out of conditions now forever past cling to the altars and taint the fellowship of a new generation, when only a better understanding is needed to

remove it forever, as those of us have discovered who have had opportunity to look into each other's hearts?

It was unanimously agreed by the Commissioners representing nearly nine tenths of the Methodists of the country at their meeting recently held in Baltimore, that the three bodies from which they came are "equally apostolic in faith and purpose." This expression of fraternal confidence, following a free and frank interchange of opinions and reviewing of conditions, should protect each of the negotiating churches from being charged with unworthy motives by members of the others. It is not apostolic to dissemble.

It was also agreed to, without dissent, that "our fathers settled the issues of the past conscientiously for themselves, respectively, and separated regretfully." The delightful fellowship of that first joint meeting in the interest of unification inspired hopes which should not be thwarted by unsympathetic comment. "Blessed are the peacemakers." It cannot be the will of God that jealousies and strifes, which are the fruits not of the Spirit but of human weakness, rather, should continue.

As a first step toward a better understanding, let us be just toward the fathers on both sides of the dividing controversies. It is one of the paradoxes of history that again and again God-fearing and Christ-loving people have made war against each other for righteousness' sake—as they understood righteousness. In such wars the men who fell while fighting each other have been alike regarded as martyrs for the truth. Strange to think of martyrs slaying martyrs! In our Civil War we had on the Union side "martyrs for liberty," and on the Confederate side "martyrs for independence." Often both came from the same community, and sometimes from the same household. As each man saw the right, so he chose his altar of sacrifice, and then gave that proof of sincerity which no other true man will challenge. On the score of that conscientious individual choice, God could not condemn either antagonist, for upon that choice depended each man's character for *righteousness*. What then? Is conscience a man-baiter, to lure men to bloody conflict? So some declare, and thereby make God a monster. The question is too large for discussion

here—but until people quit talking about conscience as “the faculty by which men distinguished between what is right and what is wrong” they cannot escape such blasphemous deductions. Conscience is the voice or spirit of God in every soul giving sanction when its course is true to its ideal standard of action, and a sense of condemnation when that ideal is disregarded. Conscience is not the artful voice of the casuist nor the changing mood of the philosopher. It is *God sitting in judgment upon conduct as related to accepted religious ideals*. Taking a normal example, the first *variable* factor in a case of conscientious action is the *ideal standard*, and that is derived from the authority accepted as divine and supreme by the individual concerned, whether Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, or pagan. A second variable factor is found in the different degrees of natural intelligence and judicial aptness available in the individual concerned for the application of the accepted standard to any proposed line of action. In short, it is religion that defines duty—without debate, but not without reason. Thus is it related to morals. Then comes in what we call “moral culture,” not to mend the ideal, but to train the understanding to perceive its strength, beauty, and reasonableness, and to interpret and apply its principles. It is at this point, after the *variable* factors have done their part more or less perfectly, according to the intelligence and training of the individual, that conscience, which is the germ of religion in every man, however long latent and inactive in some, speaks within him the only word which a righteous God could at that crisis speak to a soul consciously responsible to him for *its attitude toward righteousness*. That word is not necessarily a sanction of the letter of the conclusion reached by human intelligence aided by human reason, but it is an instant call to *do the right as the right has been discerned through the faithful use of all resources*—not excluding prayer. As a rule, the more prayer, the more compelling is the sense of *oughtness* in the case. Thus a clear understanding of the real office of what we call conscience absolves this divine Monitor from the charge of *leading* devout men into deadly combat. We have a striking illustration of the truth in the case of Saint Paul, who “verily thought he was doing God’s service” at the martyrdom of Saint

Stephen; but having been converted to a *new ideal*, for that same conscience' sake became Saint Stephen's fellow martyr for Jesus Christ.

Now, let us recall how far nativity, parental teaching, prevailing convictions, social atmosphere, and educational life and literature hold determining influence in shaping conceptions of God and religion the world over; and how sadly defective is the average training of the intelligence and reason for the application of ethical standards—to say nothing of the modern farce of teaching morals without reference to a divine authority—and we may readily account for the lamentable confusion of moral ideas, as well as for the obliquities of many earnestly religious people as judged by other religious people equally "conscientious." Still further, we may see how, through radical differences in home training, social environment, antipodal political and even religious teaching concerning acute questions of gravest import—and all this for so long a period as to perpetuate convictions by heredity—the best people of the North and the South at last found themselves in a death grapple "for conscience' sake." And if we have followed the theological as well as the logical trend of the argument, we should also be able to see how the "sweet chariots" of God that "swing low" over every battlefield may consistently carry to one welcoming heaven men who die at the same instant under opposing flags, because the righteousness of God binds forever to him—not the infallible in political judgment or patriotic allegiance, but the man who goes to death rather than betray righteousness as he conceives it.

Nearly twenty years ago Bishop Merrill wrote a little book on the subject of Organic Union of American Methodism, in which he intimated that conditions were ripening if not already prepared for an early consideration of the question. In that discussion he candidly reviewed the issues between his own church and the sister communion of the South, aiming, as he always aimed, to be absolutely just in his statements. Arguing from the progress made in fraternal relations, and from the signs of reconciliation apparent in national affairs, he inferred that the two churches must have reached a better understanding of each other's

real attitude and could not consistently remain much longer apart. Since that time wonderful events of war as well as peace have demonstrated our national unity, and surely the two great Methodist families must have been carried forward in the general gravitation toward complete reconciliation. Such an impulse of States toward States and masses toward masses it seems wicked to resist. Of one important relevant fact this writer is absolutely confident. That is that the churches of the North have reached a degree of fraternal consideration for their brethren in the South that was in the nature of things impossible forty or even twenty years ago. This is due mainly to a clearer apprehension of the gravity and magnitude of the issues that led to the alienation of the two sections. Many of the opponents of slavery, without in the least abating their judgment of the system, now concede the impracticability of any plan of voluntary emancipation, in view of the conditions that would have been entailed upon both races, prior to the war. Nor does it require profound vision to discern how the ever-increasing agitation against slavery on religious grounds, inevitably tended not only to the ecclesiastical isolation of the South, but also to such solidarity of political sentiment as ultimately to destroy its political aspect and merge the universal conviction as to political rights into the religious beliefs of the people. Many can see now as they could not then what it must have meant to Southern boys and girls to have their household faith assailed and the piety of their godly parents impeached by strangers who proposed, in the name of God and humanity, to overturn the domestic system into which they and their ancestors had been born, and of the rightness of which they had never had a question. And all who would render fair judgment of the spirit and character of the Southern people must take into account these and kindred considerations. On the other hand, it is time for our Southern brethren to concede that the people of the North were also true to the convictions that came to them by heredity and training, and that they would have merited not only human contempt but divine condemnation had they failed to antagonize what they believed to be not only wrong but hurtful to the whole country.

It is under such tests of charity for each other and of our

sense of justice, that we reveal our spiritual development and Christian consistency, and just now there comes to us, along with this crucial demand upon our religious integrity, a conspicuous challenge to magnify the Truth that makes men free from hereditary predilections.

Are we now prepared to examine candidly the achievements of a generation toward Methodist unity? The Joint Commission at Baltimore, while rejoicing in the fraternal relations already established, was "compelled to admit that results do not in every way meet the demand of the times nor the expectation of our people." The two leading branches of the family have been seeking through the principle of federation a plan of harmonious coöperation in the fields occupied by both. There has been no lack of courtesy or effort on the part of the commissioners of either body. Local misconceptions of the basis and scope of this effort toward coöperation were inevitable. In our Oriental fields the plan has worked admirably, but thus far it has hardly been more than experimental in the home field. It already appears, however, that a series of tribunals must be maintained for hearing and deciding controversies. The commissioners are still engaged in constructing a "Plan of Procedure," beginning with Annual Conference Joint Commissions and ending with the Federal Council of the two churches as the final court of appeals. Meanwhile the people of both communions are impatient with the constant irritations that occur in spite of fraternal resolutions and messengers bearing brotherly greetings, and are sometimes betrayed into criticisms of each other for alleged insincerity, and of the commissioners for possible indifference or inefficiency.

Now, the very idea of coöccupancy and coöperation is based upon the expectation that both churches shall continue to live and propagate themselves in the same field. Opposed to this, however, on one side, are traditional views which it is hard to eradicate and which constantly assert themselves. The average man is a "standpatter" where his assumed rights are involved, and ordinarily, to raise a question of equity based upon an agreement in which the party who feels himself concerned has not been an active

or, at least, advised participant, is to provoke quick antagonism. One is naturally more ready to censure the representative who surrendered his "rights" than to listen to the wooings of peace. So, after all, it is the concrete case that must at last test the value of all federative methods. And, unfortunately, in most instances they must be applied as a corrective rather than as a preventive of the evils they aim to avert, for the aggressive movement which they were designed to forestall is likely to have gained partisan following before the machinery of federation can be set in motion. Then there remain only the tedious and expensive processes of complaint and rejoinder, calling Annual Conference Joint Commissions, hearing evidence, making complete records in duplicate, at least, formal appeal accompanied by transcript of records and duplicates of all papers for use of the counsel, and, finally, the expense of the Federal Council of the two churches, *eighteen men*—six bishops, six ministers, and six laymen, called from home and regular duties, some of them from remote points to the place of meeting, to review the evidence in cases submitted, and give final judgment. Meanwhile, what has been going on at the place where the conflict originated? Certainly not a revival of scriptural holiness due to the proceedings.

Nor must it be assumed that even the General Conferences through their dignified Federal Council can make good their fraternal purposes. When property interests are involved, as they frequently are, a recalcitrant local board finds in the average State law a ready ally for perpetuating trouble, and in every community is to be found the ecclesiastical as well as the political demagogue, often both in one man—than which there can be no more mischievous combination. And at last, the peace that has to be fought for through church or civil courts is not found to be of high quality for spiritual adaptations. But even if some perfected plan of coöccupancy and coöperation could be achieved, however slow and expensive in its working, there would yet remain a very grave question, a vital question, indeed, for the two churches to answer: Can the sons of God and of John Wesley consistently confess that they require guides and guards, in the form of carefully phrased restrictions, to protect them against

each other as they go “spreading scriptural holiness over these lands”? Is there not something humiliatingly incongruous in the very thought of it? A barricade is not suggestive of brotherly love. Chiefly in the spirit that ordained it has federation been a blessing thus far.

And now think of our two great General Conferences, representing two families of Methodists, “equally Wesleyan in origin, equally apostolic in faith and practice,” by their own formal declaration, rising in each other’s fraternal presence and calling on their five millions of Methodists to sing from the same hymnal:

Onward, Christian soldiers! Marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before.

Like a mighty army moves this Church of God.
Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod.
We are *not divided—all one body we,*
One in hope and doctrine, one in charity.

And how the people sing, and how hearts glow, and how saints rejoice and angels thrill and the cross looms to heaven, and “hell’s foundations quiver”—while the picket lines, that have for so long been doing guard duty on the legally defined frontier between certain of those jubilant singers, melt away! But what next comes to pass? A rousing doxology, to be sure. Then, alas! the love feast is dismissed. The great General Conferences “resume business,” and the picket lines are promptly restored by the report of the “Committee on Federation.” Otherwise the singers in that grand “All-one-body-we, one-in-hope-and-doctrine, one-in-charity” chorus, who happen to be exemplifying their *oneness* on joint territory, might not at once recover consciousness of their *two-ness*. Federation serves to remind them that their fathers contended and separated, and that though it deplores any conflict between the sons under the new national conditions now accepted by all, yet—if they *must* interrupt the chorus and the preaching of their “one hope” and “one doctrine” by an unscriptural wrangle in the very presence of the sinners to whom they are offering their “*gospel of reconciliation*”—Federation has providently arranged a legal standing for the bout, and hopes that the rules will be observed and the decision of the umpires respected! This is not saying

that Federation has not a legitimate place and function between denominations that differ radically in creed or governmental principles. For let it be observed that in these instances federation is at once a recognition of the fact that they have *essential* differences, *not* reconcilable without loss of denominational type, as well as some doctrines in common and interests that are mutual. The principle of federation consistently applies only when unification is for fundamental reasons undebatable.

As between the two great families of episcopal Methodism we search in vain for such fundamental differences, or for any essential bar to unification. Yet we have been treating with each other as irreconcilable denominational types. Ecumenical and Federal councils representing the spirit of the gospel persist in asking *why?* In attempting to defend the *status quo* it may be urged that until these two great families can so behave toward each other under existing agreements as to inspire mutual esteem and desire for organic unity, it would be folly to bring them into one body. To say this is to so reverse the logic of the implied facts in the case as to give added emphasis to criticism of the existing situation. In order to make this plain we must use words frankly. Federation was the only possible method of nearer approach for the two bodies after the restoration of fraternal relations, because of their antipodal views of acute issues—one of which related to the question of territorial limitations. It is not necessary to follow the history of the negotiations. The essential point just here is that the situation was such that *joint occupancy* of any extended section *meant competitive operations*. Perceiving this, and properly seeking to avoid an open and unseemly struggle, for which neither side felt itself culpably responsible, the two churches adopted the existing *modus vivendi*. But the *competitive consciousness* was not thereby extinguished. On the contrary, it was acknowledged, and recognized as evil in essence and tendency by the very attempt made to regulate and limit its operation. The complication was one of the results of war. The management of it was without possible alternative. But so long as we are compelled, however reluctantly, to confess that in certain territory to which both churches feel called in caring for their

own adherents, they do, and under present relations must, represent competitive interests and conflicting plans, why should there be surprise if preachers and people on both sides do just what was expected of them? Where there are two or more parties there will be partisans and partisanship. Our origin, ancestry, doctrines, polity, and practice being by mutual affirmation the same, what else is there to contend about except ways of getting ahead? At Baltimore the situation was fitly characterized as intolerable. But neither side can shift responsibility to the other, and it is a waste of time to be forever occupied in offsetting indictments. If federation is the best solution that Methodist statesmanship can offer for this "intolerable situation," the case is desperate indeed. No evil was ever cured by regulation. No family feud was ever healed by deliberately planning to perpetuate antagonistic interests and influences. To provide for trouble is not to cure trouble. The CROSS IS THE ONLY WAY TO PEACE, and JESUS MUST NOT ENDURE IT ALONE. Since we cannot crucify the spirit of competition, let us crucify competition itself by the unification of all the forces, interests, and plans of the several negotiating churches for the victorious prosecution of their one divine mission among men.

"Are not the obstacles insurmountable?" some one asks. The answer given sometimes depends upon the attitude of the person making it toward the general proposition, but not invariably. Men, North and South, who commune with the past and dwell habitually in the atmosphere of its bitter memories will naturally magnify the difficulties in the way of reunion. It is notable that as a rule matured young men are more hopeful than their seniors. And yet it is not exactly an affair of the traditionalist *versus* the progressive. Old roots are more firmly fixed than young ones. The old oak has tried its anchorage in many a storm and does not welcome transplanting to new conditions. Happily, in this instance transplanting is not contemplated. Uprooting does not necessarily accompany the removal of partition fences between forests of identical origins. "But the soils in which they grew were different." Yes, *were* different, but now are rapidly assimilating. Giant trees have grown on both soils. With the strong

qualities of both combined both symmetry and endurance will be enhanced.

Dismissing the figure, what of the Negro? To those who regard this as the crucial question it may be a surprise to learn that there is another, quite as perplexing, the solution of which may be found to include the relation of the Negro to the Methodism of the future. The Methodist Episcopal Church contains about half the Methodists of the whole country. Hence any plan of direct union with one, or ten, of the sixteen other bodies would mean the practical absorption of the smaller. And this would involve not only the sacrifice of identity but of legislative protection against what the smaller communions thus merged might regard as measures invidious to their normal rights or convictions. They might also anticipate as possible an unfair discrimination against the relative claims of the minority to recognition in the general administration of the unified church—for administration is human, however divine the church order. Hence, our sister communion of the South would consider no form of union which would so merge its identity as to leave it organically powerless in one great General Conference. This position seems quite as reasonable as the attitude of the States toward the central government. They are to the last one loyal to the one flag, but no one of them would consent to merge its Statehood in the national organization. The only open way to unification, therefore, is through such a reorganization of the separated communions as shall constitute them one great organic entity, so planned that every part can be loyal to the whole body and the whole best serve its mission by protecting every part. This is as much beyond federation as federation is beyond formal expressions of fraternity. Whether it can be accomplished depends upon the spirit in which the several Commissions approach the task and the discretion of editors and leaders in their comments pending the consideration of it. Millions will pray for and hail such an achievement as the evidence of God's abiding favor upon "the people called Methodists." In no quarter has there appeared any disposition to "abandon" the Negro. As a distinguished Southern bishop recently remarked: "His rela-

tion to our problems is absolutely pathetic. He did not bring himself into them nor can he extricate himself from them. His claims upon us cannot be set aside." This sentence is as good as a chapter, on that subject. But in a matter so complicated the practicability of methods as related to results cannot be overlooked nor disregarded.

The details of the proposed reorganization are many and complex. Properties, charters, trusts, equities, and educational and benevolent undertakings and administrations are involved. But the spiritual and financial economies secured for the long future would warrant all expenses incurred, to say nothing of the removal of barriers to greater achievements.

Finally, there are yet other considerations, larger than denominational interests, to which Christian people cannot afford to be indifferent. Among these are reasons of state. *The churches cannot innocently retard the manifest growth of confidence and good will among the people of the country at large.* With ever-increasing benignity the soul of Abraham Lincoln has from the day of his tragic death been brooding over the land. Born in the old South, grown in the spacious West, called to sacrificial service and martyrdom in the Jerusalem of his country, that seer of seers, the mystic of deep spiritual insight, spoke in his second inaugural address like a prophet of farseeing vision. Penetrating beyond the faces of the living multitude, peering through many bleeding hearts and ghastly graves into the mind of God—for he stood almost in sight of bloody battlefields where brave Americans had died by thousands for the right as they understood it, whether from North or South—he caught the Christ-note that rang so clear and vibrant above the frenzies of fratricidal carnage: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive to finish the work we are in, to *bind up the nation's wounds*, . . . to do all which may achieve a just and lasting peace *among ourselves* and with all nations." Ah! had he lived malice would have sooner died, and charity had her way. But who can say? Forty-six eventful years have come and gone since that day of his communing with his dead and living countrymen. The "peace among ourselves"

has come. For many of these years all the States have shared the honors and responsibilities of the government. Through a later war the sons of Union and Confederate dead, led by veteran officers of both armies, carried to victory the flag of a united people. The surviving heroes of our fratricidal struggle meet without restraint in social, political, and commercial fellowship. The dead are with God and cannot suffer from malice, nor do they need charity. It is to the living that the voice of the seer is addressed. He, this modern Abraham, saw Christ's coming day and was glad as he sounded the note of vindication for the dead and of reconciliation for the survivors of the awful conflict. How his sad face must have lighted as he beheld the future of his country through the dissolving clouds of war.

And now we look upon the culmination of his dream of peace. In recent events we have witnessed the final spectacular exorcism of the ghosts of sectional strife and distrust. A Republican President has just nominated and a Republican Senate promptly confirmed as chief justice of the Supreme Court of the United States a Louisiana Democrat who was an officer in the Confederate army. With this went another appointment to the supreme bench from the same party and the same section. And these followed close upon that of the Tennessean, Judge Lurton, to the same high and responsible station. Of five appointments to the court to which all other courts, all Congresses and Legislatures, and all Presidents and governors bow in submission, three are from the old South. And no protest from any Republican club or newspaper, nor from the Grand Army of the Republic! Nor does there come from the South any intimation that these men are under any suspicion of having repudiated their past record. No special form of oath was required abjuring political heresies. The nation gives these gentlemen its confidence as readily as if they had come from Iowa or Kansas. That is to say, that the people at large are first of all patriots. They want a national, not a sectional, tribunal of final resort, and they receive these men upon the records they have made for what is now required of them—ability, learning, and judicial integrity. What is the portent of these remarkable facts? We dare to believe that they bode good, and only good, to the re-

public. They tell of confidence where suspicion grew a few brief years ago, charity outreaching political malice, unity supplanting dissension. Fed on such fruits of peace and good will, civilization should leap clear of its toils and the republic trend rapidly toward a true Christian democracy. Meanwhile let us thank God whenever enlightened statesmanship overrides any hedge of prejudice, even though it may turn again to browse in the thistle patch of party polities until another day of the Lord come.

Alas that we must confess that these children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light! Must the churches learn wisdom and charity from political leaders? Not by the contentions of the past, but out of the resources and opportunities of to-day, statesmen are shaping the future of the republic. They refuse the counsel of implacables on both sides of defunct questions. Facing the front and the demand of to-morrow, they take no note of the neighborhood scrimmages by the wayside in the rear of the procession. Onward! The best days and the greatest achievements are yet ahead. No time to umpire old controversies. Crown the dead for doing the duty that was theirs, as they saw it when they lived, and move on, emulating their fidelity to *present* duty. The times demand action, not recrimination. We are one people—let us be a great and magnanimous people. Let us be making new history instead of marching around abandoned forts. Plow them under and sow the seeds of peace. So patriotism speaks. So statesmanship interprets duty. The day of the obstructionist is past.

More than any other class are church people applauding this subordination of partisanship to public peace and welfare. We are glorying in the man who fears God and scorns the party whip. The people, the people, their rights, their interests, are held paramount to party exigency. The country, the whole country, is accorded precedence over any State or section. California must not embroil the nation by its provincial demands. The princes of Wall Street must serve, not rule, the people. National resources must not be sacrificed to private greed even under pretext of building new States. The common weal is the imperative test to which all measures must submit. Not a lawmaker in the land dares to

deny or defy this doctrine. Again we say the churches applaud this standard of non-partisan patriotism. They must stand for *the greatest good to the greatest number*, or abandon God and part company with Jesus Christ. They dare not repudiate in church-craft what they acclaim as best in statecraft. Religion must at the least be as consistent as politics under conviction or even in its occasional justified state.

But where are the outward signs of our inward grace? How far and how fairly are we applying these axiomatic standards by which we judge public spirit, public policies, and public men in civil affairs—how far are we giving them place in our ecclesiastical statesmanship? How about church partisanship?

Granted that the monstrous claims of Romish prelacy have made the form of church government an essential in polity, and that theological teaching involves conscience, and that the spirit of Christian tolerance is a virtue so bright that it should not be denied opportunity for expression, and that therefore the leading denominational divisions may indeed be for the time necessary—still it remains true that over against all claims to credits for conscience' sake on the score of fundamentals there is a larger debit entry against schismatic division of the body of Christ. The stereotyped offset that "we differ only in nonessentials," so far from being valid in reason or Scripture, is equivalent to a petition in bankruptcy. It comes very near to a confession of spiritual insolvency and of ruthless trifling with a holy trust, for denominations to admit that they are perpetuating costly divisions which have no warrant in essential truth, as they declare. Nonessentials have no valid call on conscience or devotion. Their appeal is to the partisan spirit. If we shudder at the crimes which have been committed in the name of political and civil liberty by blind ignorance, headlong zeal, frenzied fanaticism, and reckless ambition for power, with what sensations should we regard the havoc wrought by the same human weaknesses in the name of religious liberty, through the multiplication of sects, not one in ten of which has demonstrated by its growth that it had its rise in divine leading or even in human necessity as interpreted by events?

The question is upon us—How can the gospel be magnified,

souls sanctified, saints edified, God glorified, and the nation unified by seventeen divisions among Methodists, fifteen among Baptists and twelve among Presbyterians? The question is relevant. It involves the scriptural warrant of every several church for its existence. As to those branches of Methodism which are essentially at one in theology, government, and experience, the very asking of it is a challenge of their fundamental consistency with scriptural doctrine and sane ecclesiasticism. Can it be that any considerable number of American Methodists are implacables? Not by divine leadership or sanction surely. The issues of decades ago are with God and history. The men who contended then are now forever united. Long ago their war cries were lost in the eternal jubilee of the redeemed. Their sons are the loyal citizens of a united country. In the greatest conflict of the ages they stand side by side against the aggressions of the papal throne—and they need to, if America is to remain Protestant and free. In this patriotic defense of Americanism in religion the North needs the South, as in other mutual obligations the South needs the North. In church, as in national life and efficiency, the two parts happily supplement each other, each type supplying elements of power indispensable to the welfare of the whole people.

We are a new generation. We have no antagonisms of our own creating. No leader, no General Conference of our day can be fairly arraigned for controversies that grew out of conditions that can return no more. We are called to confront, not each other, but new issues, new tasks, new perils. The very foundations of our religion are being tested as never before. The reality of religious experience, the historic heritage of Methodism, is denied in the name of a modern psychology that knows no Holy of Holies for the soul of man. The voice of the Spirit is so confused with the subtleties of "suggestion" that multitudes of people who were born in church homes are without religious convictions to-day. And it is in the presence of this challenge of the divine majesty of our Lord and the sacred offices of the Holy Spirit, and in the face of a rapidly increasing and ever aggressive alien ecclesiasticism that Methodists are permitting themselves to remain entangled in the meshes of bygone controversies—not only wasting

consecrated substance and gracious opportunity, but refusing their Lord the most significant testimony in their power to give in this crisis time of Protestantism in America and of Christianity throughout the world.

In the pending negotiations the Methodist Episcopal Church should claim no precedence on the score of numbers or wealth. She should not bring statistics into the council with her sister churches. No Methodist communion of to-day is at fault for its inherited separateness—so no reproaches are in order from any source. We can only be at fault for our continued division by putting ourselves in fault. No communion has any right to ask apologies from any other for what honest men believed or did during the last century. As for our own body, we cannot unmake history, nor forfeit principles, nor abandon our own people, but we can treat with equity, and reason with candor, and plan unselfishly for one Methodism as the will of God and the best service that at this juncture can be rendered to the nation and the cause of Christ.

Carl Cranston

